Intimate Information From the Realm of Make-Believe

Wonderful Helen Keller, Who Is Deaf and Blind, Now Talks in Vaudeville

STRAINS of a catchy jazz tune floated up from the orchestra pit and into the wings of Mount Vernon's vaudeville theater. On the stage cavorted Frisco and his derby hat, assisted by several barefoot maidens in classic costume. A woman "watched" from the wings, her bright, laughing blue eyes sightless—unable to hear the strumming of the violins, the brassy blare of the trumpets and the deep boom of the bass drum. Yet she swayed in perfect time with the music, expressing her pleasure in happy laughter. The youngsters, their bit over, fluttered off the stage and gathered around Helen Keller, thrilled at meeting the wonderful woman who, by her patience and indomitable spirit, has overcome the severest physical handicaps against which a human being can be asked to labor.

Helen Keller ran her sensitive fingers over the costumes of the dancers. She felt their feet and found them bare. Then she stooped over and pressed her lips against their cheeks and hair. Every one knows that Helen Keller has been a happy, courageous woman, but now in her début on the vaudeville stage, in her backstage intimacy with the performers in the two-a-day, she is happier than she has ever been before. It is not necessary for her to tell one that she has entered upon an adventure in a fairy world and that she is having great fun. All that is necessary is to watch her talking with the actors, who are eager to meet her; to observe her on the stage when she demonstrates her ability to talk and answer questions with a rapidity and brilliance of wit that startles the audience. She has studied at college; she has lectured; she has heard opera singers by feeling their lips with her finger tips; she has written books; she has met famous men and women in the world, but now with her lifelong teacher and friend, Anne Sullivan Macy, she has made her début in vaudeville and is in a magic world. The Palace audiences are seeing her in "The Sweetest Love Story in the World." The act was arranged by George Alfred Lewis. Mrs. Macy has devoted many years of her life to the education and training of Miss Keller, and the love story is the affection teacher has for pupil and pupil has for teacher.

Miss Keller is a graceful woman, taller than the average, with laughing blue eyes and soft brown hair. She can distinguish between her friends by her sense of touch and never forgets the names of people or the occasion upon which she meets them. Either by placing her finger-tips on the lips of the speaker or with the assistance of her teacher, that equally wonderful, motherly woman, she is able to carry on a splendid conversation, words and ideas coming so rapidly to her at times that it is difficult for one possessed of all the five senses to keep up with her. We sat in a small sitting room near her dressing room and chatted. Helen sat directly in front of us and to her right was Mrs. Macy, who transmitted our remarks by spelling them into the palm of Helen's right hand, using the regular sign language. Helen talked of the movies, of vaudeville, of money, of jazz and of happiness.

"Why have I gone into vaudeville? To make money, that is the reason. I don't seem to be able to hold on to money."

"You are not spending it foolishly, are you?" was asked.

"No, others are," she replied jokingly and with a smile, emphasizing her delight with the gesture she always seems to use in the lighter moments of her conversation, a gentle, downward pat with her right hand, sometimes striking her own body and sometimes Mrs. Macy.

Miss Keller feels the location of the person with whom she is talking. She turns in his direction when answering questions, and seems to know when he is talking to Mrs. Macy. For one meeting Miss Keller for the first time, it is almost uncanny. Mrs Macy is like an interpreter except that she does only part of the work. An interpreter asks questions for a third person and then transmits the replies. Mrs. Macy simply asks the questions and Helen answers. Even if Mrs. Macy were not present, it would be possible to talk with the wonder woman, who can read the lips so splendidly with her finger-tips that Harry Lauder once quoted some poetry in his richest Scotch dialect, which she repeated without a moment's hesitation. At first it is difficult to understand Miss Keller's speech. It resembles a low, rumbling, unintelligible sound, but very soon it becomes clear—clearer than the intonation of many who were born with the gift of speech and never had to acquire it with the difficulty that she has had. When it is considered that she has never heard the human voice and has learned to speak by imitating the position of tongue, throat muscles, teeth and lips, made known to her by her sense of touch, her pronunciation and inflection are amazing.

"I like motion pictures, but vaudeville is much more pleasant. It was tiring standing around the studio and I missed the audience. I can feel the people out in front and I can feel their applause. They are very kind."

"Perhaps the camera was more truthful and less kind than the vaudeville audiences," Mrs. Macy suggested to her.

Helen agreed.

We went backstage to wait for the time Miss Keller was scheduled to go on. A stage policeman, who was also awaiting his turn, came up and was presented. She ran her fingers lightly over his uniform. Then naïvely she asked:

"Are you Irish?"

Somebody asked her to shimmy. She blushed, smiled, swayed with the music, but refrained.

On the stage Mrs. Macy tells a beautiful story of her experiences in teaching Helen, who then appears to demonstrate how it was possible for her to learn to talk. To show that the questions are not prearranged between Miss Keller and Mrs. Macy, members of the audience are permitted to ask questions; Mrs. Macy repeats them, and Helen answers.

"What is Miss Keller's age?" some inquisitive person asked.

"There is no age on the vaudeville stage," was the instantaneous response.

"Does Miss Keller think of marriage?"

"Yes," she replied in a flash. "Are you proposing to me?"

"Does talking tire you, Miss Keller?"

And here she showed that she is not much different from other women in this respect when she replied:

"Did you ever hear of a woman who tired of talking?"

At Last, Chrystal Herne Has Been Interviewed—And by a Stage Reporter

Chrystal Herne in "The Acquittal" has the reputation of being the bane of interviewers, as her father, the late James A. Herne, was their boon. She cannot be induced to talk. One of the five young actors who play newspaper men in "The Acquittal" telephoned The Tribune office yesterday, offering the assistance of his confreres in interviewing Miss Herne. All five were told to get busy and each "delivered the goods" on schedule. Norman Lane's story is characteristic.

Chrystal Herne is a nice young lady. When I went to her dressing room and said, "Miss Herne, I've come to interview you," she didn't yell, "Get out, you supe!" but asked me to come in and sit on her chaise longue, like a perfect lady. That is, she didn't ask me to sit like a lady; but treated me like a lady. I mean like a lady should treat a gentleman.

"Miss Herne," I began, "how long have you been on the stage?"

I pulled an envelope out of my pocket, preparatory to making notes on the back. I admit I copped this trick from Bill Harrigan, who is the star reporter in "The Acquittal" and is so professional that a lot of newspaper men are taking lessons from him.

Harrigan never uses a notebook on the stage, just an envelope back, and somehow this makes a great impression on the audience. Anyway, it registered for me with Chrystal Herne. "Mercy, do I have to tell that?" was her reply.

"Why, certainly,' I assured her. "That's very professional. An interviewer must always know that."

"Also one's age?" asked Miss Herne.

"Well," I said, "of course, if you'd rather not"——

"Oh, I don't mind," said she, good-naturedly, "only the public might."

"Miss Herne," I inquired next, "what is your great ambition?"

"Mercy," said the actress, a little disturbed, "you'll have to let me think about that."

Now, for your information I will try to explain something about mental acting, about which we hear a lot, back stage at "The Acquittal." I believe Mr. George Cohan is responsible for the idea. During rehearsals he used to say to the actors, "In this play you've got to make the audience see you thinking." Mr. Cohan talked so much to us about using our minds that I sometimes wished he hadn't used his so much; because through rehearsals he kept taking out lines and telling us, "Convey that idea to the audience without speaking." Mental acting is no joke, believe me. However, Miss Herne is in her element with the mental stuff. The more lines Mr. Cohan snipped out of her part, the better, I guess, she liked it. And can you beat this?—the thing she likes best about her part is that the audience doesn't applaud after her big speech!

"That is the greatest ovation I have ever had as an actress," Miss Herne told me. "The effect of the silence of the audience after that tense scene is electrifying. I simply surge with their sympathy, which is a far greater tribute than all the applause in the world."

I now repeat, Miss Chrystal Herne is a nice young lady, very pretty and natural and without airs. She's as easy as pie to interview if you put your questions professionally, like I did, and remember George M. Cohan's advice about using your mind.

Cyril Keightley Tells How Years Ago He Met Two Now Famous Men

Cyril Keightley and I made friends at once.

"Why does everybody call you an Englishman when you're really Australian?"

"Well, let me see," began this leading man of Rachel Crothers's "He and She." "I'm an Australian, as you discovered. Real Australian, too—my father had a big station there, what you call a ranch out West. New South Wales was my colony; was born and bred there, went through college there. When I graduated I worked for my father on his station. I didn't like it, so I tried office work. That wasn't much better, and I seized the opportunity to go on the stage. I guess I wanted more excitement than I was getting. So off I went.

"I went a long sight further than I had bargained, once I got into a theatrical company. First it was the bushes, what you call small time; frequently our only means of transportation was a stage coach. I don't think I need bother you with the names of the towns we played. Most of them don't have names; you have no towns in America as small as those. Well, when we had finished playing the bushes we tried our luck abroad, in Africa and elsewhere. That was when I became a scientific excavator. It happened this way. Our troupe got stranded, as happens sometimes even in America. It broke up for lack of popular support, and there I was, in Cairo, with nothing to do but earn my living. Covington was there at the time—the man who became famous by sleeping a night in the King's chamber in one of the pyramids and who has since become known internationally as an excavator. He was organizing a scientific exploring and excavating party, so I joined up with him. I shipped over to England first chance I got.

"Well, I kept getting ahead in my profession somehow or other. Soon it was Shakespeare, at the Stratford-on-Avon festivals, and before long I was managing my own company. And that reminds me of something amusing. You've heard of Hugh Mackintosh, the Australian fight promoter? He's a millionaire now, of course; all Australians either become millionaires at home or come to the States and become millionaires. I'm an unfortunate exception—but that's beside the point. Well, when Mackintosh was over here he'd heard of me. I went to see him at his invitation. He talked to me a bit, and then he said, 'You know, I've met you before. Don't you remember?' I had to confess I couldn't remember. 'Well, you remember visiting your aunt in Sydney? Yes? Well, I'm Buttons—the boy that opened the door.' And I had scarcely gotten over that surprise when in walked another chap in uniform. He was introduced to me, and said, 'Oh, yes, I've met Mr. Keightley before. Don't you recall the incident?' By that time I was raging. 'No, I don't,' said I. Well, it seems when I was playing Stratford the high school chappies had an elocution contest and I was unfortunate enough to be the judge. I had given this young fellow second prize; there was one other youngster who wasn't quite so bad. The poor chap was so cut up he almost cried. And do you know who it was? Bruce Bairnsfather, by Jove. It's a small world, isn't it?"

In "The Great Air Robbery"

Francelia Billington

Mrs. Sidney Drew Plans To Produce Four Big Psychological Pictures

The thousands who have seen the motion picture comedies made famous by the late Sidney Drew and by Mrs. Sidney Drew must have often wondered where the intimate knowledge of domestic life in America that made these comedies inimitable came from. The thousand and one touches of reality came from the hand of Mrs. Drew, who knows her Middle Western book and has found the cliff dwellers of New York strangely kin to their brothers and sisters on the Wabash.

This understanding of the American home is to be brought to play in a new field, according to Mrs. Drew's latest plans. At present under a contract with Pathé to do eight pictures, Mrs. Drew told a Tribune man of her plan, once that contract is completed, to produce four big dramas in which the psychological will displace the physical, in which American life will be represented truly.

"Motion pictures are an art," said Mrs. Drew. "You will notice the critics are beginning to comment on the improvement in the acting of those who have returned to the stage after an absence with the movies. I realize that slapstick comedy and poor films are popular—it is because they appeal to the masses. Just as well do I realize there is a public which has come to demand the standard in comedies in films that was set by Mr. Drew and myself. They are in a minority, perhaps, but to give thousands of people a true picture of life is art.

"I want to bring literature to the movies as it has not often been done before—faithfully. For five of our Pathé pictures we have been using the stories of Julian Street, which ran under the title of 'After Thirty.' If I buy such stories, or stories by any other well known author, I want what I have bought brought over to the screen. For, other things being equal, given dramatic artists in the movies, the question of art must wait on the typewriter. Stories as subtle and as true as those written by Mr. Street are what I hope to bring to the public in the four dramas that I shall produce.

"It is the only thing that I have. It is the biggest thing in my life, and I have learned to work. The only thing that I don't do myself is to cut the negative for my pictures. Naturally I wouldn't work that way if I didn't believe that it was art, that it was bringing art to thousands."

Mrs. Drew is leaving soon with her brother for a six weeks' trip in the West, where she will visit the studios of California. As soon as her trip is over she expects to begin the construction of a studio building in the East for the production of her own films.

Children Earn a Living On Stage and in Pictures While Being Educated

School, to the stage child, is more or less of an interlude between acts. But nowhere is his precocity more apparent than in the way he studies. He shuns detail. He chafes under the monotony of routine. Discipline irks him. But he is keener than the average child in subjects that give rein to the imagination. He instinctively puts color into what he reads and writes. However youthful, there is a certain dramatic emphasis about his rendering of "The cat ran after the rat" that is missing in the sing-song of the ordinary public school pupil.

These are the first impressions gained on a visit to the Professional Children's School, 227 West Forty-eighth Street, where two hundred or so of the infants of the footlights and screen are continuously being educated in the three R's.

There is a widespread misconception about the functions of the Professional Children's School. No attempt is made to train youngsters for the stage. According to Miss Jane H. Hall, supervising principal, "the aim of the school is to meet the needs educationally of children in the dramatic profession; to regulate the hours so that a child can have educational instruction while working, and to cooperate with the Board of Education in enforcing the compulsory education law and with the Gerry Society in making recommendations for permits, based upon attendance and scholarship."

The school is run like clockwork. The same standard is demanded of the children as in the public schools. Their pass mark is higher. It is 75 per cent. There are the three departments—primary, intermediate and senior. When absolutely necessary, children are excused for rehearsals, but the school cooperates with the Gerry Society in trying to induce managers to hold rehearsals for children after school hours, whenever possible. There is a complete grammar school course and, at present, two years of high school. The third and fourth years soon will be added.

Children are incessantly coming and going. Some of them are out on the road with companies. More of them play on Broadway every night. A certain proportion spend part of their time at the motion picture studios. When a manager wants a child for a certain part he goes to the school and picks the likeliest. There is an endless variety of type. If a few are extravagantly aware of themselves, the majority are normal, skylarking boys and girls. The school is not lacking in atmosphere. The children have an artistic background. In themselves they present an interesting study. They are almost uniformly good looking. One can proceed from class to class and find distinctive types in every row of desks. Curls abound, from the little four-year-old blonde to the twelve-year-old boy who, for professional reasons, retains this badge of infancy.

There is no questioning their precocity. They are polite to an exaggerated degree—for children. And they perform for one's benefit with appalling facility. If one saw no further than the classrooms one might leave with the impression that professional children were clever, good looking and priggish. But to watch their antics outside of class hours is to glimpse the human and spontaneous side of these little forced hothouse plants. They slide down the school banisters with assured skill of long practice. They whoop with all the abandon of the street gamin, and they turn cartwheels in the halls whenever they get the chance. One of the odd sights of play hour is to see a child suddenly break with natural grace and freedom into the dance. They have none of the self-consciousness of the non-professional child. Yet it cannot be said that they deliberately show off. They simply act on impulse and whatever the game is play it gracefully.

It is at the Professional Children's School that the famous Jane and Katherine Lee are being educated. The story was told of Katherine not so long ago that when a menu card was handed to her at the Claridge she looked vaguely down the list of things to eat, and finding it all unintelligible transferred her attention to the price list, which she seemed to understand. Her wandering finger stopped at something costing $5.

"This will be the best because it costs the most," volunteered Katherine.

"That's how she does it. You see, she can't read yet," put in Jane.

At any rate, Jane and Katherine are both said to be diligent students. Katherine is in the second grade and her sister is in the third. They are the admiration and envy of all the children of the school. Strangely enough, they are decorous in themselves, although the greatest of imps on the screen. They have occasionally surprised the school by breaking into hula-hula dances and doing impromptu "splits," but what are these feats compared with falling through the roof of a church in one's birthday attire, just when "fourthly" was well on its way, or turning a whole village upside down with one's pranks, as they have been known to do in pictures? The general opinion at the school is that Jane and Katherine are two hard-working youngsters, who lead a fairly strenuous life, being educated and starred extensively at the same time.

Ethel Fisher and Dorothy Herskind are two of the girls who dance in Highland costume in "The Night Boat," running under the feet of stalwart Ernest Torrence. But this does not prevent them from studying Latin, algebra and other terrifying things.

Helen Chandler played in "The Light of the World" and will be with John Barrymore in "Richard III." Almost any one of the children, casually addressed, can boast of a Broadway record. Even the Theater Guild and Drama League look to the Professional Children's School for their juveniles. The youngsters themselves are in the market, but while the bartering goes on so must their education.

Bronx Supplies Kaffirs

Atmosphere for the South African veldt scenes in "April Folly," the new Cosmopolitan film featuring Marion Davies, to be released in March, is given by six genuine, triple-ply Kaffirs. These boys were as hard to find as the priceless yellow diamond which is the center of interest in the film. At last—shades of romance!—they were found in the Bronx.

"His Honor Abe Potash"

Barney Bernard, by Fornaro

"Apple Blossoms" Girl Doesn't Just See Why Actors Are Interesting

Florence Shirley, who is giving sophisticated New York audiences something new and individual in her characterization of a young widow in "Apple Blossoms" at the Globe, cannot understand why the public should be curious about an actress.

"Why should there be so much fuss about the successful actress?" she says. "Why cannot she be accepted, like her sister in industry or in the office, without all the curiosity and unusual interest in her private affairs? The stage is just a business proposition, and the actress who is not a good business woman is soon lost in the big theatrical labor turn-over.

"I believe that good business sense on the stage and off is more valuable than the artistic temperament that tries to get impossible things through bad temper and poor self control. Don't misunderstand me; artistic temperament is a valuable asset, but it must be disciplined at all times by good old common sense. The actresses who try to confuse indifference or a streak of bad temper with artistic temperament are now looking for jobs and can't find them."

Play Broker Is Between 'Devil and the Deep Sea, Viz.: Manager and Author

The author's agent, or the play broker, plays an important but occasionally very difficult part in our present theatrical scheme; often the manager and the playwright must appear to such an agent as the traditional "devil and the deep sea." Tact and a true desire to serve the best interests of the stage must present the final solution to any conflict in the interests of author and producer.

With Mary Kirkpatrick, of Brandt & Kirkpatrick, life as an author's agent has meant more than keeping author and manager from open strife. It has meant—but let her tell it in her own words, wherein one may read between the lines her formula for success—enthusiasm.

"You know," she began, "selling plays is not like selling pig iron; each one has to be handled in an entirely different manner, but always with enthusiasm. The greatest compensation that one receives is when a play 'goes over,' but that, unfortunately, is often balanced by disappointments.

"There is such a large element of chance in the whole game. Take the case of a script for a musical comedy, written by an Englishman, that had been withheld by one of our managers because of its lack of American humor. I was working over this script one evening in my office when Dorothy Donnelly dropped in and demanded the reason for my puckered brow. Explanations followed, and she began to suggest revisions which I thought excellent. The next day I went to the manager and suggested that Miss Donnelly rewrite the script. I shall never forget his horror at my proposal.

"'Do you think I am crazy?' he said. 'A tragic actress put jokes in a musical comedy!' But I persisted, and Miss Donnelly did not disappoint me. Her work was so excellent that she was engaged immediately for two more revisions, and is now a full fledged dramatist."

Inquiry was made as to the temperaments of the folks who bring plays into the office of Miss Kirkpatrick.

"Contrary to the general impression," she answered, "authors are sane, well balanced people and no more temperamental than other people who work in the theater. In fact, I consider them the most workable unit in the theater. Novelists to whom the stage is a new venture are usually sensible enough to listen to stage managers and other initiated people. Of course, if a playwright is seasoned, he is in a perfect position to know how a play should be cast or directed. Rachel Crothers started work as a director in 'Myself Bettina' when Maxine Elliott said to her, 'Use your own judgment.' It may interest you to know that she never has had a conflict with any manager.

"Of course, we have our emotional ups and downs. I remember on the first night of 'Justice' I reached dizzy and glorious heights; the elevation of Barrymore, Galsworthy and Williams together was nothing compared to my cup of joy. But when 'Magic' failed to catch fire neither Mr. Chesterton nor Mr. Heggie or Mr. Hapgood suffered as I did.

"Given a play with an idea big enough to inspire faith and a little—or rather a great deal of—persistency and the play agent has at least a chance. Fortunately, most managers are open to conviction; they are always looking for good things. At least my personal experience in that end of the profession has been of the pleasantest. I consider the differences between the authors and the managers a matter of exaggeration. After all, the theater is a unit. To the actor, a play is a vehicle, a part of a job in proportion to his art—and salary. To a manager it is 'a property,' to the stage director, 'a show' and to the public an evening's entertainment, but to the author it is always 'a play.'"

Marmont With Billie Burke

After having appeared in five pictures for Vitagraph Percy Marmont has returned to Famous Players, where he is supporting Billie Burke in "Away Goes Prudence." Over two years ago, when Marmont first came to this country after concluding a successful tour on the Australian stage, he was engaged by Famous Players to appear with Elsie Ferguson in "Rose of the World" and "The Lie." Subsequent to this engagement he was leading man with Geraldine Farrar, Marguerite Clark and Alice Brady. He appeared with Alice Joyce in "The Vengeance of Durand," "The Winchester Woman," "Slaves of Pride" and "The Sporting Duchess."